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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001025

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: PEOPLE'S MILITIA TO THE RESCUE?

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) According to local military and civilian contacts, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has ordered the formation of a "People's Militia" ("Pyi-thu-sit" in Burmese) in the administrative division of Rangoon. Military commanders allegedly issued written instructions ordering local authorities to provide at least 200 persons from each of the division's 45 townships, which includes the capital city of Rangoon, to begin service by the end of August. The instructions also stated that military officials would provide each of the division's roughly 9,000 "volunteers" with meals, a daily wage of 200 Kyat (about 20 cents), basic military training "to protect (Burma) from subversive dangers such as a U.S.-led invasion."

2. (C) Local sources also claim that since July the Myanmar War Veterans Organization (MWVO) has played a leading role in training female members of the regime's so-called "social associations," such as the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), in basic defense techniques. Former military officers apparently equip the women members with bamboo poles for attack exercises and instruct them to defend their families against "external forces." Embodys have witnessed ragtag platoons of women, armed with assorted poles and sticks and dressed in assorted uniforms, drilling in the Rangoon area in recent weeks (Note: SPDC Adjutant-General Lt. General Thein Sein chairs the Central Organizing Committee of veteran's organization (MWVO) and SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe is the official patron. Dr. Khin Win Shwe, wife of SPDC Secretary-1 General Khin Nyunt, chairs the maternal and child welfare organization (MMCWA). End note)

Comment: The Enemy Within

3. (C) The creation of a People's Militia would be the next logical step in the militarization of a country whose governing and economic functions are almost wholly administered by military authorities. Local officials in Rangoon Division reported to our contacts that the formation of the Rangoon "Pyi-thu-sit" is an exercise designed to prepare the local population for an invasion of enemy forces from outside of the country. Such propaganda is expected from the regime, particularly in the wake of new U.S. sanctions and in unison with SPDC opposition to U.S.-led action in Iraq, and is also indicative of rising anti-American sentiment propagated by some senior officials.

4. (C) It is uncertain whether SPDC Chairman Than Shwe, Vice Chairman Maung Aye, and other regime leaders truly believe military action against Burma is realistic. However, the SPDC is quite capable of creating and training a militia as a pretext for more aggressive tactics aimed at internal opponents of the regime, including the NLD and its supporters. End Comment.
Martinez